



What is the Catapult Kitchen Incubator?

The Catapult Kitchen Incubator is designed for start-up food businesses who are seeking to grow, scale, and launch their businesses into the community.

We provide commercial kitchen space, resources for permitting, access to mentors, and discounted educational opportunities.

The Kitchen Incubator is a branch of Catapult Lakeland, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to increasing the viability of start-ups in our community. Catapult also includes a coworking space, office and desk spaces, and a makerspace.

Why does the Kitchen Incubator exist?

The incubator exists to provide a launchpad for food + beverage companies. Catapult was founded by the Lakeland Economic Development Council to act as a catalyst for the entrepreneurs in our community.

Today, Catapult functions as an independent nonprofit entity, and we exist to:

- Showcase Lakeland as a place where you can start something
- Provide value-added educational opportunities that result in growing companies
- Launch companies into brick + mortar spaces
- Connect corporations with the innovative startup community and vice versa
- Recruit and retain talent
- Foster the growth of third spaces for Lakeland employees to enjoy after work

We chase these goals by providing space, education, and funding opportunities to scalable start-ups in Lakeland.

Who is a good fit for the Kitchen Incubator?

We are a fit for companies, such as packaged food products, pre-restaurant, or pre-bakery concepts, who are looking for space + resources to grow their business.

It is our goal to see each Catapult Kitchen Incubator member launch into a space of their own, whether that is a retail or manufacturing location, within six months to three years of becoming a kitchen member.

While members are not required to be committed full-time to their business at the beginning of their journey, we expect them to transition into full-time employment in their business within one year of joining Catapult.

Because the kitchen is a shared space, we find that we are best fit for members who are owner-operators. Owner-operators are those who plan to produce items in the kitchen aided by or without employees. We are not a good fit for owners who plan to send employees in their place and do not plan to be present at the facility during production.

Additionally, Catapult is a scratch kitchen, which means that our members minimize the use of convenience products + prepared components to craft each product using the highest quality, fresh ingredients.

Unfortunately, we are not a fit for hot dog carts or food trucks that do not have clear plans to move into a permanent location. If you are pursuing this genre of food business, we would be happy to refer you to other options in our community.

What is Catapult's mission?

Our goal is to launch businesses into the Lakeland community that create jobs, boost the economy, and provide new experiences & destinations to be enjoyed by all.

We're focused on serving businesses who are:

- Scalable in terms of cost, quality, and time
- Pursuing a specific growth goal for their company
- Contain an innovative aspect that sets the business apart in the market
- Ready to challenge assumptions about their business
- Willing to give back and share experience and knowledge with others

Success for Catapult members is launching a business into their own facility in Lakeland, where they continue to grow their operation and add value to the community.

What are the benefits of Kitchen Incubator membership?

- Licensed commercial kitchen space
- 24/7 kitchen access
- Permitting guidance
- Provided equipment and smallwares
- Downtown location
- Cross promotion – social media posts, event listings, etc.
- Discounted education programming & kitchen-specific workshops
- Discounted space rentals – conference rooms, event spaces, etc.
- Member only events and networking
- Mentorship opportunities through Expert-in-Residence programming

How do I become a Kitchen Incubator member?

Because of our mission, Catapult is intentional about the businesses we accept as incubator members. Our process includes three steps: a kitchen tour, an application, and an interview and tasting.

Kitchen Tour: During the tour of the space, we review details about the operation in the kitchen and the documentation needed to formalize your food business. Tours are given during our staffed hours, which are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Fill out our [interest form](#) and we will reach out to schedule a tour.

Application: This gives us an overview of your business and allows us to have a more in-depth conversation during the interview step. A potential member is ready to submit an application when they are also ready to launch their business. Applications are reviewed four times per year on the following dates.

- February 1st
- May 1st
- August 1st
- November 1st

Applicants should complete the application fully and provide as much information about their business as possible. Depending on the information in the application, the business will move on to the interview & tasting or be invited to reapply in the next round.

Interview and Tasting: The final step of the process is an interview and tasting with Catapult staff. Before the interview, we ask our members to prepare a sample of their product. For the sample, we ask our potential members to bring a small taste of their signature product to the interview so that we can get a tangible example of what they would be creating in our facility.

This looks like a small sample portion of 1-2 signature products for two people. We accept samples prepared in a home kitchen, as we know that potential members are seeking commercial space. We taste the product after the interview is completed and during our team's internal discussion.

The interview process typically takes about 45 minutes. We have put together a detailed guide on this process that we make available to potential members after the tour and application are completed.

How does Catapult make the Kitchen Incubator membership decision?

After the interview and tasting process, the Catapult team evaluates the business according to several criteria. We find that the members best suited for the space have gathered items in their process of business formation and demonstrate business viability through product costing and marketing strategy.

Additionally, we examine potential for launch, new to Lakeland concept, and compatibility in a shared space.

Potential for Launch: Because the end goal for Catapult is to see each of our Kitchen Incubator members launch into a space of their own, we consider

each company's pathway to that launch before accepting the business as a member.

New to Lakeland Concept: We also focus on new to Lakeland concepts that can serve to diversify our local options and grow our culinary economy. We look for members who are innovating in their field.

Compatibility in a Shared Space: The kitchen space is shared among the incubator members, so a willingness to operate side-by-side with other entrepreneurs is key.

Why does Catapult require product costing?

Understanding your product costs and profit margins is vital for a food-based business because of the tight margins and changing food costs in this industry. Because of this, we require all potential members to provide product costing for the product they plan to bring for their tasting. This product costing must be provided before an interview can be scheduled. This helps us examine the financial side of your business when evaluating business viability.

If you need resources to help with product costing, start with these:

- [Catapult's Guide to Costing a Recipe](#)
- [Food Cost Calculator](#)
- [How to Calculate Food Cost](#)
- [How to Calculate Food Cost Percentage](#)

What happens after acceptance in the Kitchen Incubator?

After the interview, the next step is onboarding into the kitchen, which contains three steps:

Meet for Orientation: At orientation, the new member meets with the kitchen manager to review kitchen policies and procedures and discuss documents needed to operate in the kitchen. At orientation, a new member pays a \$65.00 joining fee, which secures their membership in the kitchen for two months. We see this timeline as feasible for most members to gather documentation and obtain permitting.

Gather Documentation: The kitchen member then obtains the needed pieces of documentation and sends copies to the kitchen manager for Catapult records. The kitchen member also applies for an annual permit with their respective licensing agency. The kitchen manager is available to help onboarding members with any questions about the documents they need to gather during this step.

Obtain Permitting: After applying for a license, an inspector will visit Catapult and meet with the member to complete an opening inspection and issue an Annual Food Permit. This permit gives the business the ability to legally

produce and sell food. When a member gains their permit, they can operate out of the kitchen. Now the fun (and the hard work) begins!

What type of documentation do I need to operate in the kitchen?

There are several pieces of documentation needed to transform a start-up idea into a formalized business. The bolded items must be submitted to Catapult prior to the opening inspection for an annual food permit.

- Business Entity Paperwork (LLC, Corp, Partnership, etc.)
- Florida Fictitious Name (if applicable)
- **Employer Identification Number**
- Sales Tax ID Number (needed for annual food permit application)
- **Business Bank Account**
- **Food Manager Certification**
- **Insurance**
- Annual Food Permit
- Polk County Business Tax Account
- City of Lakeland Business Tax Receipt

Catapult has created a separate document entitled the “How to Start a Food Business Guide” to review how to obtain each piece of documentation. This guide is available upon request.

How long does it take to get into the kitchen?

This timeline heavily depends on the business owners’ ability to devote time to gathering documentation, to come into Catapult for various meetings, and the availability of Catapult staff.

We have had members go from interest to permitting in as little as three weeks. Other members take months to decide whether to even apply, after initially expressing interest. After acceptance into the kitchen via the interview and tasting, Catapult holds space in the kitchen for the approved member for two months.

Who licenses the businesses operating in the kitchen?

There are three agencies that regulate food businesses in Florida – the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR), and the Department of Health (DOH).

We primarily interact with DACS, who licenses bakeries and packaged products, and DBPR, who licenses caterers and plated foods. The kitchen manager can help members discover which agency has jurisdiction over their business.

What expectations exist for membership?

We offer our space at below-market rate to members, and our operational costs to run Catapult are subsidized by private donors in our community. When we make a membership decision, we are then held accountable to see that member go from a

nascent business idea to a launched brick and mortar in their own facility. We expect that our members will:

Participate in member check-ins: We have open financial relationships with our members, which allow us to suggest targeted strategies to promote growth.

Education participation: We curate educational sessions and opportunities based on member requests and needs, and we expect our members to prioritize participation in education programming at Catapult.

Data collection: We collect data in yearly surveys to assess Catapult's economic impact on the community and to make operational decisions for our future. Members are asked to share data such as gross revenue, employee roster, etc.

What is it like to work out of a shared kitchen?

Working out of a shared kitchen has both significant benefits and drawbacks to consider. Benefits are detailed above and include access to a collaborative environment with other startups and access to equipment and infrastructure that would be costly for a new venture to afford at the beginning of their business. However, working in a shared space also means:

- Completing set-up and break-down tasks each shift, which are more intensive in a shared space than in a dedicated area.
- Encountering cleaning mistakes from other businesses that may impact the entire prep area.
- Experiencing the challenges and joys of working alongside others with varying personalities, backgrounds, expectations, and values.

How does pricing and billing work?

The Catapult Kitchen Incubator has an hourly pricing model that scales with the business that we serve. Off-peak hours are 10:00 p.m. - 6:00 a.m.

- \$300.00 monthly minimum for first 20 hours of kitchen time
- \$15.00 per hour for 20+ hours (\$7.50 off-peak)
- \$12.00 per hour for 50+ hours (\$6.00 off-peak)
- \$10.00 per hour for 100+ hours (\$5.00 off-peak)

Monthly Bills: On the 5th of each month, our members are charged their minimum amount of \$300.00 for the current month, plus any overages from the prior month and any applicable storage charges.

Joining Fee: A \$65.00 joining fee per business is applied on the day of orientation.

Can I store items in the kitchen?

We have dry, cold, and freezer storage in the kitchen. Our pricing is consistent throughout these areas. Storage is billed monthly, and as follows:

- \$20.00 per shelf

- \$30.00 per speed rack
- \$60.00 per lockable cage
- \$80.00 per pallet

What equipment is available in the kitchen?

Explore this list of [Catapult's equipment and smallwares.](#)

Can I bring employees to the kitchen?

Yes! In our kitchen space, we treat each business as a member and designate a primary owner within that member business. The primary owner is the main point of contact for Catapult, has a food managers certificate, and has Bluetooth access to the kitchen space.

The primary owner must supervise employees at Catapult when employees are on site and must ensure that the employees sign the Catapult employee policies. Members are responsible for following all applicable Florida labor laws. If a member business wants an employee to gain Bluetooth access to the space, the employee must have a food managers certificate on file with Catapult and schedule a meeting with the kitchen manager.

Which food managers certificate programs are accepted?

Below is a list of accredited examination programs for food managers certification recognized by the state of Florida:

- [Prometric](#)
- [ServSafe](#)
- [National Registry of Food Safety Professionals](#)
- [360 Training / Learn2Serve](#)
- [Above Training / State Food Safety](#)
- [The Always Food Safe Company, LLC](#)

Can my friends and I have a cooking competition, pizza party, cookie decorating party or something similar at Catapult?

As a kitchen incubator, our focus is on serving businesses who need the commercial kitchen space to produce their products and scale their operation. However, there are other options in our community that could serve this need, such as [What's Cooking Lakeland](#), [Publix Aprons Cooking School](#), or [NFocus Studios](#).

How do I learn more about the Catapult Kitchen Incubator?

We would love to connect with you and share more about our kitchen and the work that we do.

Website: catapultlakeland.com/kitchen-incubator

Phone: (863) 940-9660

Address: 502 E. Main Street, Lakeland, FL 33801

Kitchen Manager: Elena Schillinger, elena@catapultlakeland.com

Catapult is staffed Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., excluding major holidays. We would love to answer additional questions that you may have.